

live well, work well

Health and wellness tips for your work, home, and life—brought to you by the insurance and healthcare specialists at M3.

## Caring For An Elderly Parent

With the advancement of medicine, technology and resources, our life expectancy is quite longer than it once was. This means that more elderly adults require assistance for longer periods of time. This assistance generally falls on the shoulders of their adult children and grandchildren, who are sometimes elderly themselves.

Though caring for a loved one, specifically a parent, can be rewarding, fulfilling and a way to repay them for raising you, it can also be extremely taxing. Many of those individuals who tend to their elderly parents struggle emotionally, physically and financially. Furthermore, the stress of caring for someone on a continual basis can place stress on other relationships, responsibilities and job performance. However, there are ways to make this sometimes difficult process much easier, both on the elderly parent and the caregiver.

### **Start a Discussion Early**

Start talking about the future well before your parents become incapable of taking care of themselves. Use natural transitions to bring up the topic such as a recent health scare of a friend or a news article about the topic. Very openly and compassionately, ask them their feelings are on assistance after they are not self-sufficient.

Also, if a parent brings up the subject, allow them to discuss this topic openly, even if it is uncomfortable to discuss. Do not shun loved ones for making remarks such as “When I can no longer do normal activities on my own...” or “When I die...” Though this may be a hard to think about, it is a reality and should be discussed early on to avoid complications later.

### **Estate Planning**

Work with your parent(s) and plan ahead for care and death by establishing legal documentation of durable power of attorney, healthcare power of attorney, living will and trust. Make sure you know where this documentation is and how to access it.

This is also a time to discuss with the entire family who will take on what roles with regard to care. It may be wise to have your parents’ lawyer present to document duties.

Beyond this, you and your parent(s) should discuss funeral planning. Again, though this may be a morbid topic, it is best to plan in advance so you are not burdened with details when you are mourning.

### **Consolidate Medical Data/Supplies**

Work with your parent(s) to start a file with their medical test results, doctor’s information, medications and allergies. Also, organize medications into pill boxes so you know when and what medication needs to be taken.



## Evaluate Finances/Options

Review your financial situation as well as your parents to determine where they shall live when they can no longer live on their own.

Beyond finances, enlist the help of a primary care physician, geriatric program, neurologist and/or geropsychiatrist to conduct a geriatric assessment. This is a comprehensive assessment of an individual's mental, physical and emotional well-being to determine which setting would be most suiting. For instance, even though you may wish to have your parent live in your home, you may not have the resources that he or she needs to remain well and accident-free. This assessment will lend a hand in determining what would be best.

## When a Parent Needs Assistance...

Once you believe that your parent(s) can no longer take care of themselves on their own, talk about moving forward with the plans you previously made. If they must move out of the home and are showing resistance, listen and address hesitations. Then, express your concerns for their safety while living alone. If they are showing extreme resistance, employ the help of a physician or a trusted religious leader to participate in the discussion.

There are also ways to elder-proof the home to accommodate health changes so that your parent(s) do not need to move.

- Install grab bars near the toilet and bathtub
- Place non-skid mats in the bathtub and shower
- Install adequate lighting near stairs or high traffic areas
- Install wheelchair ramps going into the home
- Hire "Meals on Wheels" to deliver meals
- Hire a chore service to clean, shovel or do yard work
- Hire a home health aide to assist with bathing, bathroom and medical needs
- Hire a transportation company to take the parent to appointments or the store
- Install a Personal Emergency Response System

## Seek Support

Call on others in similar situations for advice and compassion. Also, seek out advice from professionals in family care giving. Beyond this, attend support groups or find an online network for individuals caring for adult parents.

## Modify Your Situation

Since caring for elderly parents can be wearing on other parts of your life, it may be wise to modify your current

situation, specifically at work. Look to your employer to modify your working arrangements to remain productive but also complete your family obligations. Under the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), you are allowed 12 weeks of unpaid time off annually to care for a family member (if you work for an employer with over 50 employees). This time can generally be taken in increments to accommodate the needs of your parent(s). Also, see if there is flexibility in your schedule.

- Try to work remotely from home
- Work on weekends or evenings

## Take Care of Yourself

While you are caring for others, do not forget to take care of yourself by eating right, getting enough sleep and remaining active. You are of no assistance to your parent(s) if you are not well yourself.

## Did You Know...?

Over 50 million people in America care for a chronically ill, elderly or disabled family member or friend.